

A collection
of thoughts
of the
cinematic
insanity of
the Far East

DEATH
GHOSTS
SEX
BLOOD
LUST
VIOLENCE
KNIVES
SKIN
DEPRAVITY
CREEPY
BONDAGE
GUNS
DEATH

a ONE-SHOT
presented by
@AFiendOnFilm

AUG 2016

EXAFM 2016: How this all came about...

My name is Dave K. a.k.a. A Fiend On Film... if you have stumbled across this fanzine and don't know who I may be... I'm a very minor character on the internet who likes to watch and review film. As a very small fish in a very large and ever growing ocean, I'm easy to miss but have a small following of fellow film reviewers. In 2015, I came up with an idea to see and review 30 Film Noirs in 31 days that I had never seen before. I actually accomplished the goal and thought in the future that I might try something similar but with a different genre.

You see, like most film nerds, I have a big problem. I have a very large and ever increasing film collection (DVD/BluRay, digital, VHS...) and cannot stop buying films. It's a sickness. Now this year (2016), I thought hard about if I was to do another "event", what films would I cover. A few months prior, I appeared on the popular horror film podcast, The Last Knock (both Billy Crash and Jonny Numb have contributed to this event) & we discussed Takashi Miike films. Hmm, I seem to have a boatload of Extreme Asian films on the shelf that I still haven't seen... So the next event was planned in a couple of days.

The plan was for the month of July 2016, I would review Extreme Asian Films that I haven't seen and offer my fellow reviewers to write something, not saying it had to be something they haven't seen, but to WRITE! I ended up writing something everyday until the middle of the month and thankfully others picked up the slack. It is a very difficult thing to do, it didn't work out exactly as planned but in the end we had a pretty full month of film reviews and conversation.

The second part of the event is what you are holding in your hand or downloaded off the internet. The main goal of EXAFM 2016 was to get some type of print edition out and to have a PDF of it available for download for others to print themselves. I have been trying to get some kind of fanzine together for a long time but something always gets in the way. With this event, I was able to put together something.

If you are new to this genre of film, this one-shot of film reviews can get your toes wet. I was able to see many excellent films (and a few duds) and it was great to see other's opinions on some classics. The "Extreme Asian" film genre is a vast one, crossing over with horror, crime dramas and historical & fantasy movies. Countries like Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand, etc... all have some very creative people who tend to mix their countries folklore into film. It all makes for a vastly different film experience than you may be used to.

So let us know what you thought of this fanzine, you can contact me on Twitter or my e-mail on the back page.

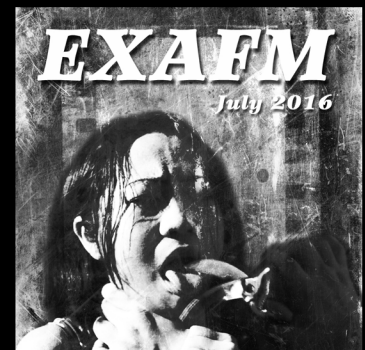
Dave K./A Fiend On Film
August 2016

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NARA KIRI: EXTREME ASIAN FILMS 2016 was designed and edited by Dave K.

Text is Press Gothic & Letter Gothic. Layout mindset was circa 1990... punk rock.





EBOLA SYNDROME (1996)

by A Fiend On Film

Ebola Syndrome (1996) film thoughts... Wow. I have had this film on my list forever to see and even picked up the DVD a couple of years ago. "One day I will see that film everybody is telling me too..." Well, that one day has come. Anthony Wong (my favorite HK film actor of all time), plays Kai, a somewhat bumbling low level gangster. One day he decides to seduce his boss's wife and is caught "mid-thrust". It seems like the end of the line has come but through a quick series of events, he somehow murders the 3 people in the room and escapes to South Africa of all places. While working in a Chinese restaurant, him and his boss travel to an out of the way place where some weird disease is taking out the villagers. After raping an unconscious woman, he contracts the Ebola virus. The thing is the lottery of life has given him the 1 in a ten million chance of immunity and he is now a carrier. Kai wants revenge on society and they are going to get it!

So as outrageous as that all sounds, I haven't even scratched the surface of the sleaze, depravity and disgust that the Ebola Syndrome is. It is a wonder to the ears and eyes. Wong cruises through this picture destroying everything in his path, knowingly and some unknowingly, getting back at a society that doesn't deserve the pain they are going to get. At times, it's a little buffoonish but for the most part takes itself deadly serious. It's extreme as they comes, graphic sex and gore come to you in buckets. I loved everything about it. After seeing this, you might not want to eat out, you never know what the secret ingredient might be...just might be the restaurant owner!

Not for the squeamish, Ebola Syndrome on every level gets the Fiend's 10/10. Another films I will be thinking about for days afterward.



DEAD OR ALIVE (1999) by A Fiend On Film

Dead or Alive (1999) film thoughts... Here is one that I have been avoiding forever since it's by a director who I like but don't totally love. Takashi Miike is a solid film maker, I just get turned off by the severe wackiness he tend to throw in most of his films. I have read quite a bit on this film and expected the worst, but it is a good candidate for this month's theme. Dead or Alive is a much deeper film than you might think, I was surprised.

There are a few groups of people here to follow. The Yakuza and Chinese mafia, a collection of misfit thugs who want to take over, a police force which is wishy washy on the violence happening and a lone hardcore cop, who is having problems with his wife and daughter (who happens to need life saving surgery). For the most part, Dead or Alive is a seriously gangster picture. All of the people in the above groups are fully realized and contribute to the overall story. The leader of the Chinese misfit gang has no qualms about taking out one of his own when he is "betrayed", even though that means they will be handicapped in the end. The police are mostly on the pad and just want everything to be steady. The loner cop is having catastrophic issues with his family and puts his job above all others (He himself though is not above "taking a deal"...).

It's a nasty film too, loads of gunplay and horrible knife violence throughout. It being a Miike film though, there is of course the weird zaniness put into the film at the most bizarre times. I mean, why is there a guy in a bird suit at one of the Yakuza/Chinese gang meetings?! The ending is just entirely off the rails and ridiculous. (There are 2 sequels and I just want to know "how"?)

I did love it, a high rating from the Fiend. The scenes with the family are just bleak, no happiness to be found. (and that makes me happy...)

THE NEIGHBOR NO. 13 (2004)

by A Fiend On Film



The Neighbor No. Thirteen (2004) film thoughts... I found out about his film from my buddy Jesse, who had it in one of his review videos. I was surprised that it was selling for a low price on-line and picked it up. The plot here is that a while ago a grammar school student Juzo was picked on daily by Akai. This wasn't your normal bullying. It was highly sadistic and ended up with Juzo getting his face blasted with a bottle of acid. Fast forward quite a few years ahead, Juzo lives in a run down small apartment. Upstairs moves in a new family, Akai's. What makes matters worse, Juzo goes to his first day on a new job and finds that Akai is the boss. Wait a minute....wouldn't Akai know this was the guy he bullied in school? He doesn't because for some reason, Juzo doesn't appear to have the facial damage he once did.... (Yes this will get confusing)

Now this type of film has been done so many times before. Juzo, we find out, has a bit of a split personality. It manifests itself as his true image, Juzo with a horribly scarred face and along with that a very violent temperament. Not at all like the meek person Juzo actually is. Once he realizes that Akai, is actually the "Akai", his dark side starts to emerge more and more. "It" doesn't seem to care who he hurts, friend or foe. Juzo wants "revenge" but doesn't want to do anything but the "other side" is all in. This leads to a large bit of nastiness which turns into many to be disemboweled or dismembered. You really need to see the film to see how it plays out as with most films of this type, it can get confusing if you are not paying attention. A few flash-backs flesh out more of how the characters came to be and there are surreal art house moments that I am sure "mean something"....

In the end, this is a pretty good film. It's dirty, depressing...makes you want to take out bullies while they are young. As this film shows, it never ends, they just get older.

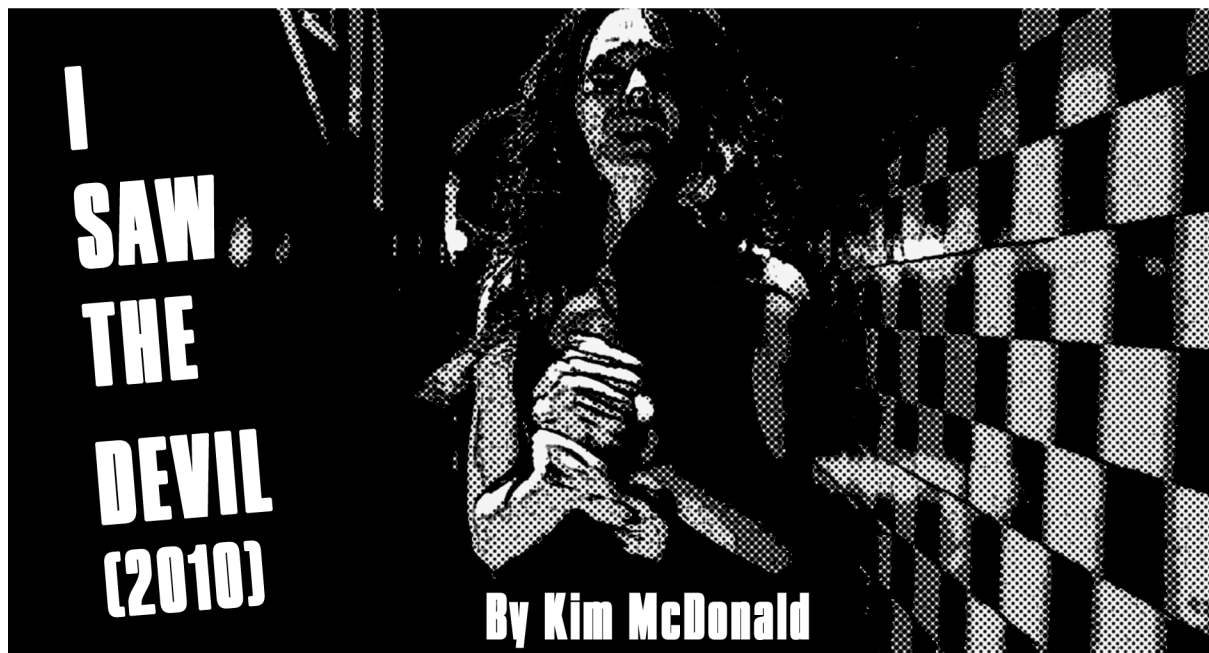
X-CROSS (2007) by A Fiend On Film

X-Cross (2007) film thoughts... It seems like I owned this DVD forever and always heard mixed things concerning the film itself. The imagery on the sleeve tends to make you think this is one kind of film, but goes into another direction entirely. Shiyori is running from a broken relationship and her friend Aiko suggests this hot springs vacation spot. It's a good thing she really wanted to get away as this place way out in the sticks. There is some weirdness going though. It seems the village has some folklore in their past and that men back then used to cut off the left legs of the women so they couldn't leave. After having an argument with Aiko, Shiyori receives a strange phone call (coming from a cell phone laying on the closet floor!) warning her of impending danger. Right then, something is banging hard on the front door....

Ok, that will be as far as I go as this is a film to experience fully. It takes a bit to get going, there is a lot of mystery and character development they need to present. The film itself is set in chapters and they all intersect at times, a well worn story telling device that is needed here and thankfully doesn't get too confusing. Being a extreme Japanese film, of course there going to be a bit of wackiness involved. That comes in the form of a strange woman who is bent on revenge, towards Aiko specifically, who favor very large scissors as weapons. This gets even more bizarre when she appears even later in the film with scissors as large as her body. As we gets towards the last chapter, off the rails is too kind a statement. I really liked the beginning mystery aspect X-Cross had, as there was much to pay attention to and it was involving. Once the film became an over the top affair, you think "What happened? This was good..."

X-Cross will be seen again by the eyes of The Fiend, so it's a recommend of sorts. The fans of the crazy Japanese style of filming are going to love much of it. I just wish it kept its initial focus and they would have had a great Wicker Man style (which the influence is obvious) film...





I SAW THE DEVIL is often linked to Chan-wook Park's revenge trilogy. While it does explore many of the same themes, especially *SYMPATHY FOR LADY VENGEANCE*, which also stars Min-sik Choi as the psychopathic killer, *I SAW THE DEVIL* continues down a deeper and darker path. Its message is there are inhuman predators all around us and we are simply prey; and when we cease to become prey, we become predator.

Soo-hyeon, played by Byung-hun Lee, who also stars in *J.S.A.* and Kim's *THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE WEIRD*, is a secret service agent avenging the brutal murder of his fiancée, Ju-yeon (San-ha Oh.) He soon identifies Choi as the killer and begins stalking him; periodically catching him, torturing him and patching him up, only to let him go to pursue him again.

There is plenty of disturbing violent imagery in *I SAW THE DEVIL*, but Min-sik Choi's portrayal of killer Kyung-chul is deeply unsettling. In my opinion, his performance ranks as one of the best psychopaths on film. Choi is probably best known for the movie *OLD BOY*, and for playing a child killer in *SYMPATHY FOR LADY VENGEANCE*. As chilling as that performance is, it pales in comparison to Kyung-chul.

As I watched Kyung-chul, I thought of what Quint says in *JAWS* about the shark having dead eyes. Kyung-chul moves through the movie with the same ease as the shark through the ocean. He is a supreme predator completely within his element. Every setback seems only temporary. He is always moving forward, devouring everyone in his path with a dispassionate bemusement. Even as he butchers Ju-yeon on the cold basement floor, and she pleads for her life, he is detached. He seems bored with so many easy targets. He appears to almost welcome the challenge of Soo-hyeon.

Soo-hyeon wants vengeance. However, he doesn't want Kyung-chul in jail or even to kill him. He wants to know why. He wants an answer he can understand. He wants Kyung-chul to suffer; to feel the same fear and pain Ju-yeon felt, that he feels. No matter the final outcome, Soo-hyeon will never get what he wants. Kyung-chul and the other predators scattered throughout the film, feel nothing. They are a malevolent void, and at the end, Soo-hyeon realizes he now carries a part of that void within himself. There is no atonement, resolution, forgiveness or even oblivion at the end of *I SAW THE DEVIL*, only the hungry abyss of loss.

Jee-woon Kim (Director/ Adaptation) Hoon-jung Park (Screenplay) Rating 4/5



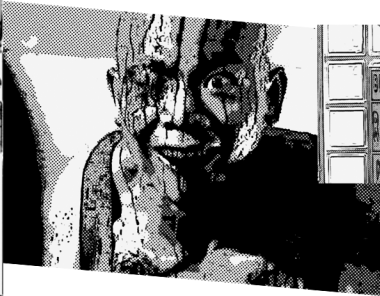
STACY (2001) by A Fiend On Film

Stacy (2001) film thoughts... Sometimes in order to see "the film", you need to watch some of "those films". I have been sitting on the fence for this one since it came out. I heard it was a gore fest but at the expense of being really silly. Throwing all caution into the wind, I decided to take the plunge into the film called Stacy.

In the near future, a weird virus/disease has consumed all girls on the planet between the ages of 14-16. It causes them first to be extremely and overtly happy ("Near Death Happiness") and then they die. The next phase is they become zombies which the media has deemed to call "Stacies". So the government has created a police force to deal with the epidemic, "Romero Repeat-Kill Troops", by law the only ones to do so. The story focuses on two couples that are in love and what they have to face in the crisis, both of the women in the relationship are in the unfortunate age range. It all ends up very bloody for most as the only real way to "kill" a "Stacy" is to hack her into 165 pieces (TRUE!).

Sigh. While this film does have the amazing gore, it is so goofy and over the top. It has that look I hate, the made for TV, soap opera style visual, everything is too clean, etc. The girl zombies are played for laughs and there are many references to older zombie and horror films. There is even a "Blues Campbell Hand Chainsaw" for sale you can buy. For me, this would have been a way better film if they just played it straight with a much darker tone.

Well, the good news is The Fiend can put this one behind him and hope to never think of it again.



RED TO KILL (1994) by A Fiend On Film

Red To Kill (1994) film thoughts... Sometimes it's amazing to even think about how some films get made considering the nature of them. I saw an article about this film and was able to track it down for viewing. I had no idea what I was getting myself into with Red To Kill and after seeing this CAT 3 insanity, I need to scrub myself with acid to get the sleazy grime off.

A social worker whose specialty is working with the mentally handicapped, is asked to pick up a young woman whose father was just killed in a car accident. She brings the woman back to the group home, a bleak set of apartments in a even more bleak and rundown building. The head of the group home is a nice enough fellow but has a dark side. When he was a child, he witnessed his mother kill his father and brother with a meat cleaver (she caught the father in bed with another woman) and now the sight of red sets him off with a sexual and killing rage. He gets a fascination with the new woman because other than the fact she has the mentality of a 10 year old, she is actually a very attractive woman (Lily Chung, the actress who portrays the girl, really is put through the ringer in this film). One evening after seeing her perform a dance program in a RED dress, his true inner self comes out and repeatedly rapes her. When the social worker figures out what actually happened, she has the guy arrested. The ensuing court drama ends with him getting off because the girl cannot defend herself in court. This all leads to the social worker planning a revenge which sends this film into new heights of depravity.

Wow. This film can be a hard watch, especially the scenes of the group home and the brutality the residents receive from the "norms" who live in the building. There is very little happiness here. Nothing is left to the imagination when it comes to the rape scenes, the women are brutalized. They try to lighten it up a bit as they depict the psycho guy a little over the top but the themes of the film negate this quickly. There are obviously nods to Maniac (1980), the character has issues with his mother and women in general, he also is talking to his "mannequin" that he has in apartment.

This is a film that can lead to much discussion, so even though some will find it repulsive, it gets a super high recommend from The Fiend. I'm glad I was able to check this out and wonder why I haven't heard of it previously. Very depressing.

MAREBITO (2004) by A Fiend On Film

Marebito (2004) film thoughts... I have been wanting to see this film for a long bit since it's done by Takashi Shimizu, the director of my favorite Japanese horror film, Ju-On: The Grudge (2002). This one thankfully goes into another direction and I have to say this film is the closest to "Lovecraftian" than any other. In the end, I was like, that guy got it right.

Masuoka is a freelance cameraman who works primarily on documentaries and news programs. One day, while filming a man commit suicide in front a group of people, he noticed something strange about the man's eyes. It seems he "saw" something that terrified him so much to stick a large knife into his brain. At that point he becomes obsessed with it. So much so, he returns to the place of the suicide, a subway station, and somehow enters another world of a dream like state and death. He comes across a young naked woman...who just happens to be chained by her ankle to the wall. So what do you think he does? Hmm...could it be he releases her and brings her back to the other world?

She "seems" to just be a young beautiful woman, but she doesn't seem to have any strength and cannot talk. In one sequence has him "checking" her face and discovers she has vampire fangs. But it is real? That is the thing with Marebito, you don't know what is real in Masuoka's world. He seems like he is consistently trying to find something, never satisfied, always looking for "it" (A Lovecraftian theme right there).

I'm going to end it there, because I think this film is top notch and it needs to be seen and appreciated. If you have been looking for a Lovecraft themed film done correctly, Marebito is it.



THE FAMILY THAT EATS SOIL (2005) by A Fiend On Film

The Family That Eats Soil (2005) film thoughts... Some times I see weird films that I like and you just have to be in the proper frame of mind to appreciate. I picked this up just based on the title alone, which you must admit is a stunner of one. After reading some of the front and back cover blurbs, it seemed like something I would normally approach with high caution, but since I was looking for films I hadn't seen yet, The Family That Eats Soil looked to fit the bill. Why not? You only live once.

This is a look at a motley crew of a Filipino family's life. As the title suggests, for all meals they eat soil. While it may be garnished with vegetables, it's just soil. If that wasn't weird enough, each character is then shown what they do in life...and it is some out there stuff. So out there that I am not sure what the filmmaker (Khavn) is trying to show us. They tend to speak in very long monologues sometimes making sense (the daughter goes through a rape scene in dialogue) and others, I really don't know. It's shot mostly hand held on the streets in a city in the Philippines and strangely many languages are spoken (This is an English subtitled film, not that it helps much!) The opening of the film is an insane mindblower though, a Claymation sense of a woman getting raped by a group of men and machines...whose "apparatus" gets progressively larger and stranger.

Describing this further isn't important because The Family That Eats Soil is not a recommend for me. I am putting this up there with films like Gozo, Visitor Q, Gummo, etc... that I wouldn't want my worst enemy to have to witness.

THE LIVING SKELETON (1968)

by Jason Feters



In 1954, Toho released *Godzilla*, the one Japanese movie seen globally by more people than any other Japanese movie and set in motion an iconic image known by all. Considering how often *Godzilla* has been on TV and brought back for revivals at movie theaters, it is most people's first exposure to Japanese movies, even eclipsing the great Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*. A few years later, Daiei released *Gamera* in 1965 and another iconic monster would delight children worldwide on last night Horror shows. Not to be out done by both Toho and Daiei, Shochiku, the company that released *Tokyo Story* (1953,) by Ozu Yasujiro, decided to create unique horror movies such as *The Living Skeleton* in 1968. Both *Godzilla* and *Gamera* were large mystical creatures that fit in neatly with the 50's big bug movies and therefore contained science fiction elements. *The Living Skeleton* is straight up horror from the William Castle tradition that recalls *House on Haunted Hill* and *Ghost Ship*.

Director Matsuno Hiroshi carefully crafts a creepy atmospheric tale of dread and vice and all on a low budget. Yet, the beautiful cinematography, the eerie surf guitar music, and a polished script prove that with the right creative crew a quality movie can be made despite limitations.

As soon as *The Living Skeleton* starts, you know you are in for a good time. Pirates have taken over a ship called the *Dragon King* and the hostages are savagely gunned down, one of the victims has a twin sister named Saeko, who has a special bond with her sister that only twins seem to have. Saeko is staying at a seaside Catholic church with a priest.

One sunny afternoon, Saeko is out on a boat snuggling with her boyfriend. The two decided to go scuba diving and during their underwater adventure, suddenly skeletons appear, chained at the ankles, as they float ghostly through the water towards the divers. This is an effective scene that sets up the supernatural events that follow.

Saeko is tormented by her sister's death at the hands of evil men and she feels a connection with her dead sister. So overcome with this obsession that takes over her mind, she leaves the church, leaving the priest and her bewildered boyfriend behind.

One of the men who gunned down the hostages is an alcoholic who has spent all the money he helped to steal on booze as he wastes away at the bar inside a night club. He believes that the woman he murdered is appearing to him as a ghost. He tries to explain this intense feeling of persecution to his boss, another one of the pirates, that the girl's spirit is seeking revenge, to which the boss violently yells at him to go away and to not return. In a great moment you see the wretched look on his face and the insanity in his eyes, her ghost is working on him. Soon she will appear to get her revenge. Japanese ghosts usually have a vengeful spirit that seeks out to hurt those who caused the spirit pain in life. The criminals will have to account for their sins.

One of my favorite moments in *The Living Skeleton* is seeing the ghost ship appear in the mist. On board, bats fly through the corridors, as wooden doors creak as they open and close. It truly is a haunted ship that unnerves the characters who walk around. The ghostly ship becomes a character much like the fog in John Carpenter's *The Fog*.

The Living Skeleton is definitely worth your time. It has all the great scare tactics that make William Castle movies so much fun. Although light on the blood and gore, it has a similar eerie atmospheric touch as *la Mario Bava* in *Black Sunday*. There is nothing complicated to understand relating to Japanese culture and at times it didn't feel so much like watching a Japanese movie as just watching your favorite horror flick. So the next time you are in the mood for some late night classic horror, put in *The Living Skeleton* and turn out the lights, you'll soon see that terror is the international language.



LIVING HELL (2000) by A Fiend On Film

Living Hell (2000) film thoughts... This film, also known as Iki-jigoku, has a fantastic Giallo style opening and sets the stage for a very dark, mysterious and demented story. Poor Yasu...he is a 22 year old man, bound to his wheelchair but really cannot remember what happened and nobody in his family ever really told him. One day, the older brother tells the sister that they are taking on some distant relatives who have fallen on hard times. After some resistance to the idea, the brother and father state that they are Japanese and their culture dictates you don't abandon family. Yasu wishes they did, because once the older lady and young "looking like a corpse" 22 year old woman enter the home, all sorts of weird things happen. They don't really speak and are usually standing or sitting right next to each other the whole time. The fun really begins every time the family leaves the house and Yasu alone. The two guests torture Yasu in gruesome and horrific ways. One particular piece of nastiness has a taser to the genital area....multiple times. There is a side plot where a journalist has been following a murder from a year before and wants to do a story on it. Is it the same two people that are tormenting poor Yasu? Hmmmm...

Living Hell is an excellent film on all levels. The pacing, writing, acting (especially the two guests who have to be motionless for long scenes) are great and the insane nature of the film will keep you interested. I always wanted to know what happened next. It plays with homages to older European films with it's cinematography and while graphic in nature, much of the torture is not shown but you know by Yasu's screaming what the heck is going on. It's nasty business. You will be also picking out some American films it's cribbing from and is handled deftly.

There really is a whole bunch more going on here, so I will leave you to track this one down for yourself. A high recommend from the The Fiend, Living Hell is just that.

REVENGE: A LOVE STORY (2010) by Chris Genro



Directed by: Ching-Po Wong Written by: Lai-yin Leung, Juno Mak, and Ching-Po Wong Starring: (main leads) Juno Mak and Sola Aoi

Here is a brief synopsis

A murderer is targeting police officers and their pregnant wives. In the murders the wives are pregnant and their yet unborn baby is removed and left to die next to the mother. The killer is later apprehended on a bus while trying to flee the scene of his latest crime. Seems like an open a shut case but what led the killer to commit these heinous acts in the first place??

Revenge: A Love Story is a Hong Kong production with mainly a Chinese cast, the exception being Sola Aoi who the female lead who is Japanese. When doing research for this review I discovered that she was actually a former Japanese Adult film actress. You might think this might be surprising to me but the sexual violence and nudity that is in the film, I have a feeling it would be difficult to find a "mainstream" actress for the role.

The film is broken into 5 chapters and has a fragmented storyline with time jumps so the beginning of the film isn't necessarily the beginning of the story chronologically. This to me is used to great effect as in the beginning of the film we start off with two gruesome murders but then we jump back to discover what led the killer to commit the crimes. The film is very gruesome at times and has all the trappings of a typical revenge film but the true heart of the story is in the love shared between the two main characters. The things done to both of them are shocking and disturbing but through it all their love continues. The acting in some scenes wasn't amazing so while I greatly enjoyed the film overall, it fails to reach the heights of the very best of the genre (typically from South Korea). But make no mistake as a fan of revenge films I was genuinely surprised at how it tackled the subject from a different angle.

With lesser films you have your typical good and bad characters but in this film it challenges you with shades of grey. As much as you feel that retribution is warranted you also feel dirty at times in the way it's delivered. The fact that it wallows in its grotesqueness is its way of also advocating against the very violence its showing you. It challenges you to think if there was no revenge taken would their life actually be better?

This film isn't for everyone but if you're fan of revenge cinema or extreme films definitely give this one a try. It will horrify and disgust you with scenes of violence but also impress you with scenes of beauty and peacefulness.

OUTRAGE (2010)

by Jonny Numb

In the mid-'90s, Hollywood had an infatuation with cherry-picking the prolific action stars of Asian cinema and priming them for Stateside stardom. Audiences fell in love with Jackie Chan with *Rumble in the Bronx*. Chow Yun-Fat (from John Woo's best films, *The Killer* and *Hard Boiled*) headlined stuff like *The Replacement Killers* and *The Corruptor*. And Jet Li landed the villain role in *Lethal Weapon 4: Too Old for this Shit*. While this trio had a good run at the box office and on home video later, one of the more curious - not to mention fleeting - Hollywood acquisitions was that of Takeshi Kitano (who, as an actor, goes by the pseudo-pseudonym Beat Takeshi).

1995's *Johnny Mnemonic* will forever have a place in my sentimental heart, as it is one of the first R-rated movies I saw theatrically. A financial flop with a script about 2 decades ahead of its time (the dystopian world it presents - set in Newark, of all places - would transfer gracefully to a Netflix original series these days), it nonetheless carries an unexpectedly generous 5.6-star average on the IMDb. In that film, Kitano played Takahashi, the CEO of a sinister pharmaceutical company; an older actor at the time, his presence was relegated to lurking in the margins for most of the 96-minute run time. He did possess a distinctive stoicism and physical presence that went toward giving his character hints of dimension missing from the script.

Watching Kitano in *Outrage*, a completely different kind of film, one sees the passage of time manifesting in ways that complement both his character and the story overall. With piercing dark eyes and a mouth that seems permanently fixed in a sarcastic half-smirk, Kitano possesses the stocky physical frame well-suited to a ruthless gangster. Yet, for as formidable as his directorial prowess is (he also wrote the script), he doesn't possess the looks and presence of a conventional leading man - his closest Stateside corollary would be Harvey Keitel, whose grizzled, character-actor looks betray a ferocious commitment to craft that is always at odds with Hollywood's generic notions of what a "protagonist" should be (and thus why his presence gels so well with the likes of outliers and risk-takers like Abel Ferrara and Quentin Tarantino).

Kitano also proves more than capable as a director, bringing scenes of action and ultra-violence to the screen in bold and sometimes unexpected ways. I tried taking notes on the plot of *Outrage*, but found it a losing battle. The important takeaway is: two factions of the yakuza find themselves embroiled in a turf war, with the "Chairman" (Soichiro Kitamura, a dead ringer for Mao Zedong) of organized crime pulling the strings. It's all needlessly convoluted, and in the early going, it's sometimes hard to discern who's working for whom (perhaps that is Kitano's deliberate commentary on the conformity and ever-shifting allegiances of cold-blooded criminals in fitted suits).

The violence is slick and impactful in *Outrage*, from an early scene of a man's face being slashed with a boxcutter, to a mob boss's mouth being mutilated (in a dentist's chair, no less). Like Takashi Miike's cinematic experiments in cruelty, Kitano has a knack for presenting the aftermath of these brutal injuries with a sense of the poetic, coupled with the type of slight exaggeration one might find in a surreal horror film (the apparatus the mouth-injured boss wears, for instance, looks like something out of *Audition* or *Ichii the Killer*). Clearly, this is a world where actions speak louder than words.

Kitano has fun toying with potentially clichéd characters, and while certain performances veer into camp territory, it is always for a purpose. I particularly liked Ishihara (Ryo Kase), a young beanpole in glasses who looks like the least threatening of the Ikemoto Family, but is prone to fits of ferocious brutality; he also occasionally lapses into English, much to the surprise of those playing off his assumed ignorance of the language. The mob bosses themselves come across as middling old men who spend too much time at the spa, or gambling in casinos run by their own clan. With the fickle way the power structure is presented, it's little wonder that Otomo (Kitano) and his crew starts to get fed up with being low men on the totem pole. Despite the fact that none of the characters engender much audience sympathy, they certainly function as corollaries to the working stiff watching their "Screw-The-Man" exploits.

Jonny Numb's Rating: 7 out of 10 [109 minutes. R. Director: Takeshi Kitano]

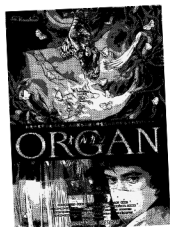


SYMPATHY FOR MR. VENGEANCE (2002) by A Fiend On Film

Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance (2002) film thoughts... Why it has taken me so long to see this Park Chan Wook film is beyond me but I finally did. Ok, I have seen both Oldboy and Lady Vengeance (part of the so named "Vengeance Trilogy") and was saving this one for last, even though it's the first film. It is really, really difficult to explain this without spoiling, there are three main characters to focus on: Ryu, a deaf and dumb young man, whose sister needs a kidney transplant; Yeong-mi, his anarchist girl-friend (played by Doona Bae from The Girl At My Door) and Dong-jin, a business owner who laid off Ryu from his job. First off, Ryu needs 10 million "dollars" to get his sister the operation, he finds out about underground organ dealers that will "help" but since his blood type is wrong for his sister, they want to take his and will find another donor. He gets jacked and his girlfriend suggests they then kidnap Dong-Jin's daughter, which they do but there are tragic consequences and that leads Dong-Jin to hunt down Ryu...

I was literally stunned by how awesome this film was on every level. It's near perfection from the cinematography, the acting, the script, etc. Even with all the weirdness Park throws into this thing, it is there for a reason. The way he sets up the vengeance of all the characters is unique from any other film out there, it all makes sense in the end. The story from the first frame is bleak and tragic, you know from the very beginning that will be no happy ending. I loved it and I will go out on a limb and call it better than the other two films in the "trilogy" (that is a tough one I know because Oldboy is near perfect too...)

This film is one of the harder Tartan titles to get these days but I do believe it has been released on other labels. It's a must for your film collection.



ORGAN (1996) by A Fiend On Film



Organ (1996) film thoughts... Another one of those films I "heard" about but never was able to see. Thankfully, I was able to find one online new for a few bucks. To try and even explain most of what is going on would be a disservice to everyone. It begins with a couple of plainclothes cops infiltrating a illegal organ harvesting operation. One dies and his body is stolen by a biologist who is conducting weird experiments between plants and humans (he also seems to like his young female High School students to die for progress...) The main story is the cop who survived looking for his partner's body and to eliminate the rest of the organ harvesters. Believe me, much, much more goes on....

Right off the bat, I loved this film especially the choppy editing and use of blown out film stock. It's gory, gooey, has loads of extreme violence and sex (many times together) & has many artistic moments throughout...all need to be seen to be believed. The score is strange because it has a light feel, it hits you most when you are watching scenes of utter depravity. Death is a luxury in Organ.

I don't have much else to say but to see it. It's a perfect combination of arthouse and gore which many Japanese directors are well know for. This one will stay with you for a bit.



TORMENTED (2011)

by Michael E. Wilson

[A.K.A. Grey 1951]

It must be said at the outset that one man's Extreme Asian Cinema is another man's Julie Andrews Film Festival. As one who tends to avoid films loaded down with graphic violence and buckets of (hopefully fake) blood, my concept of "extreme" is no doubt quite different than someone with a higher tolerance for the glories of gore. However, in the last few years I've begun to appreciate horror films from Japan, especially those from directors Takashi Shimizu (JU-ON, THE GRUDGE), and Kiyoshi Kurosawa (KAIRO aka PULSE). Although these films contain a certain amount of violence, they tend to rely more on mood, atmosphere and dark, horrific imagery to provide viewers with chills and thrills. With his 2011 3D release, TORMENTED, Shimizu continued his legacy with a work that combines the expected creepy atmosphere and imagery with a disturbing element: the victims of the horror are children.

The story concerns Kiriko (Hikari Mitsushima), a young girl who lives with her father, Kohei (Teruyuki Kagawa) and her little half-brother, Daigo (Takeru Shibuya). Kohei is a creator of pop-up books for children. Kiriko has suffered some sort of trauma that has left her unable to speak. She is very protective toward Daigo and worried about him, especially since he inexplicably killed a rabbit that was being raised by the children at their school. Kohei seems too preoccupied to share Kiriko's concerns about her brother. One night Kiriko takes Daigo to the 3D horror film THE SHOCK LABYRINTH, and a stuffed rabbit comes out of the screen into Daigo's arms. Daigo begins having strange dreams where he is taken to an amusement park by a giant rabbit. At first, the rabbit is friendly and they have fun at the park. But soon the rabbit's appearance changes, becoming menacing and threatening. The rabbit leads Daigo into an abandoned hospital where he sees a vision of a woman bleeding and dying on a gurney.

Kiriko tries desperately to communicate with her father about Daigo's nightmares. Her father reacts in anger and tells her to stop her delusions. After this, Kiriko begins to remember events that she had repressed. A few years ago her father brought home a new wife, Kyoko, who was pregnant. Kiriko was unable to accept her new stepmother and became increasingly angry and agitated. One day her father took her to an amusement park. While riding on the carousel, she is surprised by Kyoko, dressed up as a giant rabbit. Kyoko gives her step-daughter a stuffed rabbit as a gift. Kiriko pushes Kyoko away, causing her to fall and go into premature labor. At a nearby hospital, Kyoko dies along with her infant son. Kiriko, in her guilt and grief, has imagined that the baby had lived. Daigo has been a creation of her delusional mind. It was Kiriko having the dreams, Kiriko who killed the rabbit at her school. She has been living in fear of Kyoko coming back for revenge.

In spite of regaining her memory, Kiriko continues to see Daigo. One day he leads her to the abandoned hospital where Kyoko and her baby died. Daigo stabs Kiriko and pushes her down a stairwell to her death. At the film's end, Kohei is seen walking hand in hand with his little son, Daigo.

This film is graced with an outstanding performance by actress Hikari Mitsushima, and the other actors are equally convincing, making the surreal, somewhat convoluted plot, believable. There is such an overriding feeling of sadness and dread throughout the film, achieved mainly by the incredible cinematography and set design. Our first look at the amusement park in Daigo's dream features a brief shot of dazzling beauty. But the beauty is swiftly replaced with a darkness that permeates everything else in the film. Shimizu uses scenes from his own film THE SHOCK LABYRINTH as the movie-within-the-movie. The appearance of the giant rabbit of course brings to mind Frank, the mysterious rabbit from DONNIE DARKO. But the difference between the two cinematic hares is quickly established.

Violence is minimal, but the death of Kiriko is, in my mind, worthy of the term "extreme". Most horror fans would probably disagree.

TORMENTED is worth seeing. It's imagery, and Miss Mitsushima's very intense performance, will haunt you. And you will never look at the Easter Bunny in quite the same way.



KICHIKU DAI ENKAI (1997) by William D. Prystauk

Also known as BANQUET OF THE BEASTS, the movie is based upon the Asama-Sanso Incident. During a ten-day siege in 1972 at Karuizawa, members of the United Red Army (URA) turned against themselves, resulting in a blood bath. And in KICHIKU DAI ENKAI, the blood bath's ultimately explored at great lengths.

Some may trash Kazuyoshi Kumakiri's film as a slow moving student project, but that's overly harsh. The movie is slow in a very arthouse sort of way, and what sometimes seems to be an homage to David Lynch, yet this does not mean the characters are any less compelling, even if the story lacks a bit of substance.

In KICHIKU DAI ENKAI, a political group waits for their leader's triumphant return from prison. In the meantime, his girlfriend, played by Sumiko Mikami in her only film role, keeps the home fires burning by having sex with the guys in the crew and bullying them. Ultimately, she snaps, which leads to torture, blood, muck, rape, penal removal, and even more carnage.

The acting's strong, the special makeup effects are quite impressive, and the film certainly ends up fittingly in the category of "extreme horror" and "disturbing cinema" - thanks to a few compelling scenes, especially one involving Mikami at the mercy of a fellow cohort and a ready to blast shotgun.

In a way, much like George Lucas's THX 1138 (1971), KICHIKU DAI ENKAI attracted others upon Kumakiri's graduation from film school, and he has gone on to helm eighteen more feature film projects. Granted, he's not a multi-millionaire out to destroy his original work, but this film brought the young director much recognition in his native Japan.

Before I had learned about the link to the aforementioned URA incident, I was enamored on a thematic level, and thought Kumakiri chose to comment on his generation and its lack of vision thanks to an overwhelming sense of apathy and a general disdain for the status quo. With the climax, it seemed to be a comment that the disintegration of intellectual youth would lead to a bloody end to the great island nation. Then again, even without the tie in to actual events, the themes hold up, as well as the director's fear for Japan's future.

KICHIKU DAI ENKAI may not be perfect, mostly due to pace and some issues regarding narrative structure, but the movie will not disappoint those who enjoy violence and gore - or want to see one of those films labeled as "forbidden fruit" by the masses.

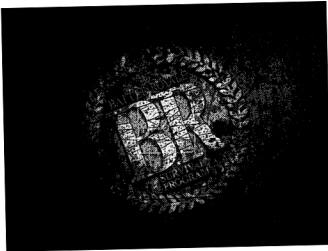


SODOM THE KILLER (2004) By A Fiend On Film

Sodom The Killer (2004) film thoughts... Can't even give this a serious review as it is quite possibly the worst "film" I ever sat through in any genre. Two witches curse a king who had them imprisoned and killed for murdering this new bride. The curse follows the ancestors and creates Sodom The Killer, who wants to take over the world with dark arts and science.

OK that's it. You don't need to see this unbelievably inept production. How does a film maker make an "extreme" violent film with out bloodshed. There is NO special effects in this one. Guns fire a million bullets, all hitting their targets, no holes. Swords slice, same thing. They use a very obvious rag doll during fight scenes and a train is derailed...it's a toy train. If this was supposed to be a joke, I didn't get it, especially when they are selling this as some dark ass shit.

Literally the worst. The film makers and all the actors should have been dragged out of their homes and beaten after making this.



BATTLE ROYALE (2001)

By Jonny Numb



[121 minutes. Unrated. Director: Kinji Fukasaku]

You gotta hand it to Asian schoolkids: they could be the most resilient, adaptable human beings walking the Earth today.

Seriously: Sin City notwithstanding, how often do you see bodies riddled with a dozen bullets at close range, that somehow bounce back to fight some more (even delivering profound parting words before shuffling off this mortal coil)?

When SkyNet was considering its design for Terminators, the tech department probably had Battle Royale streaming on an endless loop.

While all of Internet Geekdom has caught fire lately with nit-picking, ultimately meaningless "chicken-or-the-egg" arguments comparing the adaptation of a certain popular young-adult novel to this rip-roaring, fire-on-all-cylinders Japanese import, the Bottom Line is this:

Battle Royale is an astonishing piece of cinema. And The Hunger Games, for all its derivative elements, remains a compelling read.

And this is coming from someone who finds most offerings of Asian cinema slow, dry, and preoccupied with style over substance. Sure, the films may be postcard-pretty to look at, or plumb depths of imaginative horror that Americans are tone-deaf toward...but 9 times out of 10, the feeling I'm left with is one of alienation, something that may well be the result of my own cultural background.

In any case: Battle Royale is still an astonishing piece of cinema, and easily refutes some of the above paragraph.

If you can discern the tongue-in-cheek satire piercing the violent hard edges of Paul Verhoeven's films (think Robocop and Starship Troopers), you will be right at home here.

The setup is ingenious, done in rapid-fire voice-over during the opening credits, cutting right to the chase: it's The Future. Unemployment is at an all-time high. Youth are rebelling against the educational establishment. The Government decides to subsidize a macabre televised contest where a class of 42 high-school students is set loose on a deserted island.

The objective? Kill or be killed. With room for only a single winner, Battle Royale is a free-for-all hybrid of "The Most Dangerous Game," Lord of the Flies, and an elaborate Monty Python sketch (I tend to say that about any movie that takes the bloodletting to comical extremes; I really have to find a new comparison).

And what the hell: let's throw in some John Hughes-style teen angst and romance!

I had always been aware of the film's cult reputation, but was never curious enough to actually view it until recently. The experience was therefore untainted by spoilers or anything beyond a basic plot outline. And by the time I got to the end credits, I was so glad.

Battle Royale is a grueling, visceral experience that caught me in its spell from start to finish. The less said about the actual plot and character turns, the better, but for a film that daringly juggles disparate tones, emotions, and stylistic flourishes, I couldn't help but wonder how this all didn't go disastrously wrong.

I laughed. I thrilled. My emotions stirred. I was left in aural rapture by well-known classical pieces used in painfully ironic and dramatic ways. And I was ultimately shaken to my foundations. Battle Royale is an absurd, spot-on metaphor for the battleground that is High School.

And so much more. Just see it.

Jonny Numb's Rating: 8.5 out of 10

(This is a slightly revised version of a review that was originally uploaded to my blog, Numbviews (numbviews.livejournal.com) on April 4, 2012.)





Reviews by
Bill Meeker
and Danni Winn

IMPRINT (2006) REVIEW by Bill Meeker

The prolific and controversial Japanese auteur Takashi Miike created Imprint as an episode of the "Masters of Horror" television series. Broadcast in two seasons (2005-7), the series is an anthology of shorts by well-known horror directors. Helmers included icons like John Carpenter, Dario Argento, and Tobe Hooper. They received creative license and relative freedom from conventional constraints on material and themes in exchange for agreeing to work with a low budget and on a tight schedule.

Yet Showtime refused to broadcast Miike's episode after it bought the rights to the series. The network decided it was too disturbing for cable TV and cut it from Season 1 (2005-6). Showrunner and executive producer Mick Garris explained the brouhaha in an interview for a 2006 New York Times article:

"We made it clear that we were going on American pay cable television, and even though there wasn't as much control over content, there still were concerns. And then when we got the first cut, it was very, very strong stuff, and we made some suggestions on what might help before we showed it to Showtime. The Japanese made the changes they were comfortable with, and eventually we arrived at a film that he was happy with and we're all happy with. But Showtime felt it was not something they were comfortable putting on the airwaves."

Fortunately for J-Horror lovers, the series' DVD release includes Imprint. The film also screened at the Yubari International Fantastic Film Festival in 2006. Bravo UK aired it the same year. But what was so disturbing about the film that Showtime decided to cancel it?

As adapted for the screen by Daisuke Tengan from a novel by Shimako Iwai, the basic story is straightforward. An American journalist, Christopher (Billy Drago), returns to Japan during the Victorian era. He's searching for Komomo (Michie Itô), a geisha whom he had met on a previous visit, when the two had fallen in love. Christopher promised to return for Komomo and take her to the United States.

The film opens with Christopher traveling via boat through waters infested by corpses. He arrives at an island populated only by geishas, pimps, and mama-sans. While the other male passengers choose a woman for the night, he looks for Komomo. He meets a syphilitic pimp (Mame Yamada) who denies knowing Komomo. The tout advises Christopher to spend the night inside for his own safety. Christopher chooses the only geisha who does not try to solicit a customer. Sitting back in the shadows, she reveals only her profile to him. Things get more complicated with each minute after the woman (Youki Kudoh) joins Christopher in his room. She has a facial deformity that is emblematic of her history. It turns out that she knows -- or did know -- Komomo.

In a series of increasingly disturbing versions of her own history, the woman reveals what happened to Komomo. That history includes such transgressive topics as infanticide, incest, and torture. Miike includes a particularly brutal sequence that involves Shibari, the Japanese art of rope bondage. The film culminates with the shocking revelation of the reason for the woman's deformity.

Although he "chews the scenery" on occasion, Drago plays with gusto his obsessively driven character, who becomes completely unhinged in the end. Kudoh balances Drago's histrionics with an initially restrained performance that grows more dark and menacing with each scene. As Komomo, Itô is as gorgeous and charming as Kudoh's character is twisted and duplicitous -- but there's a convincing reason for the latter. The sumptuously detailed set design for this film provides the perfect backdrop for DP Toyomichi Kurita's cinematography, which makes excellent use of chiaroscuro. Despite some of the disturbing content -- which is admittedly shocking at times -- the overall effect is artistic. This is no mere shock-and-awe production. Highly recommended to all lovers of horror and Japanese cinema, Imprint is available on DVD via Netflix and also streams on Vudu.

IMPRINT (2006) REVIEW by Danni Winn

In doing my part to help celebrate the contributions in Asian genre cinema this month, I'm honored to share the love I have for one hell of a prolific Director, Takashi Miike, and his movie IMPRINT. This particular title can be found within the first volume of Mick Garris' brainchild, The Masters Of Horror, which is an impressive collection of film submissions from some of the most revered names in Horror. Volume I of The Masters Of Horror boasted names such as Dario Argento, Joe Dante, John Carpenter, John Landis, and obviously Takashi Miike, each film includes loads of bonus materials sure to appeal to the genre geeks of the world.

IMPRINT is merely one of Miike's approximately 100 productions he has sat in the directors chair for, easily earning him the title of one of the most productive filmmakers out there. At this years famed Fantasia Film Festival, Takashi was awarded the remarkable honor of a Lifetime Achievement Award. He's fearless, genre bending, and quite unique. It's almost as if Miike is an acquired taste, because I've come to see either people love him or hate him, never really encountering a passive opinion of his work. Miike's catalog of films is eccentric and eclectic, including the legendary and violent gorefest of his motion picture adaptation to the Japanese Manga Ichi The Killer, following the exploits of a troubled, twisted, and unwell young man named Ichi and a sadomasochistic Yakuza soldier in search for his missing boss. The level of brash, unapologetic violence in Ichi The Killer is downright astounding to some movie fans, alienating a large number of the films audience and rightfully taking its place among my list of 'Incredibly Difficult Films To Watch'. When the movie you're about to watch has the opening credits emerge from semen, courtesy of masturbation initiated by taking sexual gratification watching a woman being mercilessly assaulted, you know you're in for one controversial flick! Takashi Miike epitomizes extreme Japanese cinema with Ichi The Killer as well as Audition, Visitor Q, and 13 Assassins.

IMPRINT is honestly one of my favorites from the Director, with the story holding true his trademark gore and penchant for the extremely unusual. Showtime ended up banning this addition to The Masters Of Horror episodes, deciding not to air it shortly before the scheduled premiere on U.S. television. Every time I show IMPRINT to someone for the first time, the words "what the fuck did you make me watch?" or something alike are uttered to me. It's great! The movie may be viewed as slow starting to some, but immediately a weird and ominous tone is established, with introductions to some unforgettable characters such as the intensely unconventional looking actor Billy Drago (The Untouchables, The Hills Have Eyes - 2006). IMPRINT opens with us learning just why this American traveller named Christopher is eager to roam the number of unpleasant whore mongering establishments in rural 1800s Japan, in search of one specific young woman. Separated from this staggeringly beautiful woman, the traveler is determined to locate his lost love Komomo (Michie) and return to America with her, giving her all she deserved and desired, to ask for her hand in marriage. In his quest, he meets a being that is the unnatural mashup of the 'dream midget' from David Lynch and Mark Frosts iconic television series Twin Peaks, and the bird like entity who sits atop the head of one of the epic mazes checkpoints in Jim Henson's timeless Labyrinth. To top off the creepy factor, this little fucker has a large chunk missing from his nose which is almost impossible to look away from as he speaks cryptically to the American man. Encouraged by the mini monstrosity he most recently met, Christopher is directed to seek out a whore who is facially deformed. This prostitute knew the woman he so desperately was trying to reunite with, and may have news of her whereabouts. Simply referred to as The Woman, and impeccably portrayed by Yuki Kudo (Rush Hour 3, Mystery Train), the deformed prostitute is tracked down by Christopher within a strict, unfriendly, unfair whore house operated by a tyrannical House Mother (Toshie Negishi) and her psychotic assistant (Shimako Iwai, author of the novel).

A common factor within Miikes productions are the presence of some really awful women who enjoy partaking in acts that demonstrate exactly how devoid of any humanistic traits they really have. IMPRINT is no different with the likes of the Madam and her sidekick. Upon meeting and procuring the services of the attractive yet physically altered Woman, he receives a warm and sympathetic welcome from her. They sit, drink Saki and converse. The Woman opens up to the traveler, revealing she did yes in fact know Komomo, she was there also working. Komomo was the only one who befriended the outcast and bullied girl. She shared her story of how she was to become a Daughter of Joy and how it was a living hell to be one. The Woman tells of her chronically ill father, and devoted and loving mother, a Buddhist priest who took it upon himself to show her friendship which was in stark contrast to what the fellow children of the village gave her. Her father ended up succumbing to his illness, dying in the river which ran beside their poor homestead. The mother of the deformed child, with no means to provide for her, sold her a freaky side show, thus beginning her life of being sold from one owner to another. Eventually ending up on the Island of Whores and meeting Komomo.

The tale of Komomos demise is graphic and intense. The young and beautiful, good natured Komomo was set up for a theft she did not commit which resulted in a most brutal and prolonged torture session at the hands of the House Mother and her sadistic assistant. Steel pins are placed underneath every one of her fingernails as well as strategically placed within her mouth, in the gums. Its a horrendous sight, as Komomo is also hog tied and strung up by the ceiling. Underneath her armpits, a large handful of lit incense sticks are used to inflict excruciating pain in a most sensitive area. The petite and demure beauty is no more as the torture ensues, both authority figures of the whore house looking on in satisfaction. Not being able to take the pain, the abandonment of her American lover and not knowing he was searching for her, Komomo hangs herself. Christopher is of course beside himself with grief and guilt, spewing curses and crying drunkenly. And this is where Miike's love of the weird and unusual take focus. The Woman and her behavior, her demeanor quickly fade into something darker. As if she couldn't wait to shed the act of awkward, abused, and fragile, the Woman morphs into a vile representation of evil. If you've never seen IMPRINT I wish to not take away your right to enjoy the surprises at the end, for they are unforgettable and beautifully captured. That is something I've always loved about this film, is yes it is grotesque with everything from floating baby fetus' in the river to incest, but it is meticulously shot with great attention to colors and tones. It plays upon so many shared fears and worries we all have such as guilt, shame, denial, and lost loves. How a life of constant neglect and abuse can systematically shut down what makes us human to only give life to something that wants to destroy life and it's pleasures. A cautionary tale to some perhaps, but a magnificent source of Japanese genre cinema to all.

MUTANT GIRLS SQUAD (2010) *by A Fiend On Film*

Now where have we heard this before...a bullied school girl Rin on her 16th birthday finds out that she is a "mutant". After seeing her parents killed in front of her (her father is the one who passed on the mutant gene), her latent ability of growing a huge clawed hand, complete with musical strings (?), comes out. Bent on revenge, she loses controls and massacres much of the town. Feeling out of sorts on this newly discovered talent, she is taken in by a similar group of mutants. Rin soon finds out their leader is actually a power hungry mutant bent on resurrecting an old powerful god to help reign down death and destruction on the earth. Then Rin takes it upon herself to stop him.

No 2010's *Mutant Girls Squad* is not going to win any awards for originality, even within it's home country of Japan where it was made. I'm still not the biggest fan of the over the top anime style, even the gore hound in me finds the gushing geysers of blood silly. Some of the character designs are interesting, I guess you have to give them credit for coming up with a chainsaw that comes out of the ass and breasts which reveal katana blades. The main problem visually is when you see this on BluRay like I did, it reveals the "cheap" rubbery look of everything. The shot on video, clean digital look doesn't help either. I guess it says something though that I stayed with this film all the way to the end. It kind of keeps you wanting to know what they will show next and how they will end it.

If you like Japanese films, especially the crazy ones that makes no sense on any levels, you will love it. Everybody else, approach with caution, your mileage will vary immensely.



by A Fiend On Film THE CHASER (2008)

The Chaser (2008) film thoughts... Been hearing about this film from South Korea for a long while now and finally was able to check it out. An ex-police detective (with a very tiny heart of gold) turns to being a pimp for money and some of his girls haven't been going missing. After a short investigation, he narrows it down to one guy who very early on is revealed to be a serial killer (not a spoiler). Problem is nobody really believes him or the killer and that sets the tone for the entire film...

The Chaser is a very well done, well paced and shot film. You really are stunned by the bumbling and corruption of the police presented here. They need proof this guy did it but even after he tells them he did it, they still waste a lot of time trying to figure things out. You kind of feel for the ex-detective, he is stuck in a bad place of his own doing but at the same time, he is trying to put things right. Trouble is everything is against him from the very beginning. Hyper violent, lots of blood and depressing situations make for a great film. It's one of those films (and there are many) where you are in disbelief on how much punishment the human body can take. I'm not sure I would be getting up after taking a hammer blow to the head. Add this to your watch list...

TRAFFICKERS (2012)

by A Fiend On Film

I never heard of this film before I blind bought the WellGo USA BluRay, it sounded interesting, a film about organ trafficking. Sort of like those "urban legends" you heard about people waking up in a bathtub missing a kidney. The plot is a small group of men have been doing this for years until a huge mishap ends the life of one of them. A few years later, the story picks up with the group dealing drugs and other illegal commodities to stay in business. The leader is love with a cruise ship ticketing agent, who pays him no mind due to his shady business practices. That is until her father needs a new heart and she turns to him for help.

As cool as the story and themes are in Traffickers, the length of the film (I know all Korean films are at least 2 hours...) and the convoluted pacing, drags this one down in the end. There are so many flashbacks I couldn't keep up with it. It could have definitely been trimmed down a half an hour, especially after when I would consider "the ending". This is not to say there isn't a reason to stay with it. The sheer nastiness of the characters can be a joy to witness. The "doctor" they hire to do the operation is one of the sleaziest people you wouldn't want to ever meet. One scene has him licking the breast of his unconscious victim and it is done so nonchalantly, you are just like, "Damn!"

If you can find this one cheap (which thankfully, most WellGo Titles can be found so), pick it up. I personally don't feel it is a strong enough film to watch over again. It has the bleakness I like in my films though it's too long and too much to pay attention to.



FEMALE PRISONER SIGMA (2006)

by A Fiend On Film

As sometime I buy Japanese films just because they are, I ended up with Female Prisoner Sigma a while back. Yes, as you can imagine this is a Japanese "Women in Prison" film but the cover of the DVD does the olde "bait and switch". A lady, whose sister was sent to the prison for the attempted murder of her boyfriend, kills the boyfriend and asks to get sent to the same prison. Her reason? Her sister was killed in said prison and nobody is saying what happened. Seems extreme to do right? Well, it just happens at the same time all this is going on, a mysterious force that is going through the prison might actually have had something to do with it. Just what the hell is going on here?

As a film, this is really low quality stuff. Has the look of a soap opera and some really poor CGI. While there is some excellent scenes of debauchery, inmates being bound and whipped, excessive violence and abuse by the wardens, the whole thing falls flat and not as extreme as I would like it. What kind of "women in prison" film doesn't have a shower scene? The two lead wardens really are the devils though, the look of glee in the head wardens face as he is using a riding crop on one of the unfortunate inmates is a wonder to behold.

I kinda liked Female Prisoner Sigma, but won't not see it again. Way better films in this genre, a video of all the best scenes would be nice though...it would last a few minutes top.



Shoko Hamada

2LDK (2002)

by Jesse Midnitekrawlr

2LDK is a 2003 film directed by film veteran Yukihiro Tsutsumi that will entertain, shock, and captivate you by the end credits. This violent thrill ride stars the busty Eiko Koike playing Nozomi, an innocent small town girl who has recently moved to Tokyo to try her luck in the film industry as an actress. Her agent has generously provided a 2 bedroom loft for her and his other client Rana played by Maho Nonami. Rana is a sophisticated city girl, trendy and very knowledgeable of the ins and outs of the movie industry. These two polarizing roommates are trying out for the same movie role and are awaiting the directors final decision of who of the two will get the part.

That night claustrophobia sets in as the anticipation builds among the ladies trying to get through the evening and cohabitation. Nozomi, a neat freak scolds Rana any chance she gets for her untidiness and accusations are thrown around mentally and verbally. Rana retaliates by constantly bragging of her acting experience and bringing up Nozomi's lack luster love life attempting to manipulate weakness. The cerebral abuse escalates among the two until all hell breaks loose!

Pill popping, chainsaw slashing, electrocution, toilet bashing, drowning, sword fighting, egg throwing, and more ensue. The result is utter destruction of the 2 bedroom apartment and balls to the wall climactic ending! This hyper violent dark comedy is highly recommended and at 70min. The experience will punch you in the gut and kick you in the nuts perfectly. 9/10

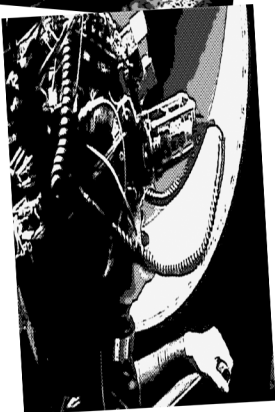
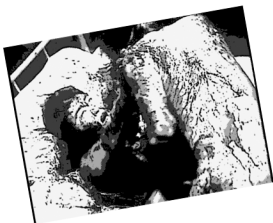


RUBBER'S LOVER (1996) by A Fiend On Film

Rubber's Lover (1996) film thoughts... I picked up this DVD quite a while ago, not sure if I would ever watch it. I knew I would have to be in the right mood and so it seemed fitting to check it out for this event. It's really difficult to explain this one but the basic plot is two researchers are conducting extreme tests on human psychic abilities. All involve loud noise, "the ether" and something called DDD (Digital Direct Drive, remember this is the 1990's when computing started to really break out of it's infancy). There are terrible side effects from all of this leading to the death of the test subjects. Their funding is to be pulled (but the funders of course have ulterior motives) and they take over the lab when the representative of the company, a rigid female scientist, comes to lab to take the research they have already done. I'm sure this being an insane Japanese art-house film you can see where this is heading.

Like I said above, this is a hard one to describe and I wouldn't want to said to much. The reason being is this film is FANTASTIC on every level. The filming quality is so weird and experimental, 1:33 full frame, black and white, blown out imagery. The editing choppy but strangely compelling. I would love to see a documentary on how this was done. I know this is not the first time a film like this was made (I'm sure the Tetsuo series is similar) though this is the first time I have experienced this. Rubber's Lover has a bit of everything for the extreme film fan, lots of blood/gore/bodily fluids, forced sex and insanity. You need to be in the right frame of mind to experience this masterpiece.

So yes, highest recommend from the Fiend. I need to check out more of director's Shozin Fukui's work. I'm still thinking about this film weeks after viewing.



RAMPO NOIR (2005) by A Fiend On Film

Rampo Noir (2005) film thoughts... I tend to gravitate towards anthology films since I love the short film in itself. I haven't seen too many Japanese Horror anthologies in my time, so I was ready to check out Rampo Noir. The 4 stories included within are based on the work of Taro Hirai a.k.a. Edogawa Rampo, a writer I do not know much about except for the fact he wrote dark fiction. So let's look at the stories/films within Rampo Noir...

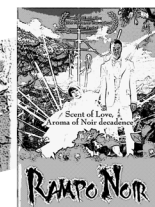
Mars Canal: In this mostly silent film, a nude man finds himself on an barren alien landscape. He seems to be fixated on a large pool of water. It is then where he begins to relive a sexual experience that ended in severe violence and the death of his partner. This gets repeated over and over and he begins to see his reflection as the woman...is this hell?

Mirror Hell: An interesting story where a group of women each connected to a mirror maker, ends up with their faces being burned off when they look into one of his creations. Is it supernatural or is there a rational explanation? A group of investigators try to solve the puzzle before death strikes again. (I found this one interesting just for the fact that every scene has large groupings of mirrors. I wonder how they filmed this thing...)

Caterpillar: An extremely creepy and extreme look into the relationship of a woman and her severely wounded husband, who had just come back from a war (Think Johnny Get You Gun for reference). She is torn by the love she has for the man and the disgust of his now immobile and useless self. Out of the 4 films here, Caterpillar is the most graphic, gruesome and sadistic.

Crawling Bugs: Very weird film, done mostly in flashbacks and possible unreality. A limousine driver for a singing star, becomes obsessed with her in the most possessive manner. This leads to all sorts of horrifying results.

Overall, while this started out slow for me, as the stories pass and get more and more extreme in nature, I found myself all in. Each tale is filmed exceptionally and the acting is strong all around and the effects were very well done. I did like Caterpillar the most as the story was very deeply involving and so bleak. An absolute nightmare. This is a keeper and should be added to your film collection for sure.



PERFECT BLUE (1997) by A Fiend On Film

Perfect Blue (1997) film thoughts... Another one of those films I heard about back when I was still in NYC and I would read in the Village Voice and Asian fanzines, I just never got around to it. As I do love older anime, I wanted to finally sit down and check it out. Mima Kirigoe is a singer in one of those put together pop groups in Japan and wants to further her career. She gets an acting gig on a crime drama called Double Bind and things start to get weird from here on in. She seems to unknowingly have an obsessed fan who has set up a fake web site which has been giving out false info mixed in with some truths. This causes Mima to go further into a unreal state. What is real? Did she really take those nude photos for the magazine? When people around her start being murdered horribly, she begins to believe she might be doing it, but is she?

Simply put, Perfect Blue is one of the best dark anime films I have seen. It's not for kids, with it's scenes of extreme murders, implied rape and nudity. The way the script is, you never know where it is real or in Mima's mind, you don't get a break throughout the picture. I also loved the deep attention to detail like reflections in windows and the city scenes which are bursting with life. While sadly the print I saw was in English, that actually helped when there was background conversations and noises going on. It's pretty much quality all around, you just need to brace yourself for the more extreme scenes.

A high recommend from the Fiend if you can get access to Perfect Blue. Luckily, I came across an unrated VHS tape widescreen. The DVD is out there but since it is OOP, the cheapest price I have seen it for is \$25. I do want to add it to the collection on disc, so I hope to find it at a more reasonable price.

MOEBIUS

By William D. Prystauk (aka, Billy Crash)

Moebius is not easy to describe by definition. August Ferdinand, the renowned German mathematician, created and christened the "moebius strip" as a surface with only side and one boundary, which means it is a mathematical property devoid of orientation. Many simply think of it as a loop: a flexible, infinite, rubber band.

In the case of writer/director Ki-duk Kim, Moebius (South Korea, 2013) is a drama not akin to a "circular argument" of illogical fallacy fame, but something karmic: what goes around comes around. In Moebius, we have Father (Jae-hyeon Jo), who has cheated on his wife (Mother, played by Eun-woo Lee, who also plays Mistress), which has not only left her scorned and hostile, but the tension and continuous emotional percolation has affected their impressionable and coming of age, Son (Young-ju Seo).

Originally banned in South Korea, possibly due to a negative look on the family, Moebius has developed a cult following for several reasons. This drama is multi-thematic and thus multi-layered, and serves as warning for fathers to maintain face (honor) and not to destroy their family from within. After all, innocents, like Son, may have no way of coping with seeing their family come undone, and Mother's who feel betrayed can rightfully broil over with their anger.

Due to the infidelity and for being played a fool, Mother attempts to cut off Father's penis with a knife, and once thwarted, enters her son's room. The implication is that once the Son sees what the head of the household can do, and get away with, at least momentarily, this may inspire him to do the same when he becomes a man. In this way, Mother's pre-emptive strike can protect women of the same fate - thus ending the cycle, or circle, or August Ferdinand's moebius, from continuing.

What follows is a tale that explores the corruption of innocence, the discovery of pleasure through pain, the handling of jealousy and guilt, and the righting of wrongs via destruction. To go into detail would ruin the intense narrative, which must be seen to be believed since it is truly a unique story.

Like his fellow Korean counterpart, Chan-wook Park (Oldboy, Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance, and Stoker), Kim brings audiences a fresh look on traditional tales and genre stories, and has entranced viewers with The Isle, Time, 3-Iron, and much more. His approach to cinema brings a fresh eye to drama, where boundaries are always crossed, if not annihilated, and each new scene is a guessing game of "What could possibly happen next?" Quite often, developing a theory for how Kim's films will end proves to be a fruitless endeavor.

Regardless of the themes and surreal approach to storytelling, Moebius exemplifies Kim's commitment to having quality actors bring life to the characters which inhabit the film. Jae-hyeon Jo has appeared in a number of Kim's films, and brings a cool intensity to his role as Father, though he can explode into something fierce, or buckle into a mess if need be. Most important, especially in Moebius, as with Eun-woo Lee, body language and the look behind the eyes says so very much. For her part, Lee plays both Mother and Mistress with verve. Both characters are clearly different, and Lee undergoes an array of emotions for each persona that must have left her exhausted off set. Her facial expressions and dramatic depth is intense and always revealing in naked emotion.


To complement the acting, Kim's cinematography keeps us in every moment as if Moebius is an intimate play. The camera often focuses on the family, without long shots or one's that denote setting, which reflects that the family is trapped in a world of their own doing. Since Mistress slept with Father, she is also part of their world, and the camera stays close to her as well.

In a film like this, where no dialogue exists, sound is paramount. However, unlike David Lynch's Eraserhead or Blue Velvet, or Hélène Cattet's and Bruno Forzani's The Strange Color of Your Body's Tears, where sound can be distorted and overwhelm or supplant the visual, Seung-yeop Lee chose to keep things straight-forward and honest, as if to ground the subtle yet surreal nature of the narrative. Otherwise, In-young Park's original music enhances the visuals without being over-indulgent or interruptive.

Kim and company have delivered an unforgiving and disturbing drama of infidelity, incest, and indiscretion in an incredible manner. The film is riveting and scenes will remain with you for a lifetime. Love it or hate it, when Kim's story comes full circle, you'll definitely be left with something to talk about.

4.5 out of 5 stars





The films presented here are just a small taste of what has been created in the world of Extreme Asian Cinema...do a little research yourself and discover more.

Labels like Tartan Asia Extreme, Tokyo Shock and WellGo USA are good place to start. Do a search on You Tube for the really obscure stuff.

Thankfully, with a few exceptions, many of these films are easy to aquire, you just need to put the effort in to find them and start building your collection!



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